United Nations A/63/715

General Assembly

Distr.: General
10 February 2009

Original: English

Sixty-third session
Agenda item 118
Programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009

Standards of accommodation for air travel

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on the standards of accommodation for air travel (A/63/524) and met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information.

2. The report of the Secretary-General was submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 42/214 of 21 December 1987 and other subsequent resolutions and decisions. The report provides information on the use of first-class travel by delegations and by the President of the General Assembly, as well as exceptions to the standards of accommodation for air travel authorized by the Secretary-General for the two-year period ended 30 June 2008 and comparative statistics for the two-year period ended 30 June 2006.

3. The standards of air travel at the United Nations are governed by a series of General Assembly resolutions and decisions, including resolutions 42/214, 45/248 A and 53/214[1] and decisions 40/555, 44/442, 46/450 and 57/589. Pursuant to the discretionary authority vested in the Secretary-General to authorize exceptions to air travel on a case-by-case basis to first-class and business-class travel by air in special circumstances that so warrant (see A/63/254, para. 5), the Secretary-General has promulgated administrative instructions for the purpose of implementing the various staff rules relating to the standards of accommodation for air travel and the exceptions thereto, the most recent of which is ST/AI/2006/4 and Amend.1.

4. For the period 2006-2008, 243 exceptions were authorized, representing an additional cost of $537,654. For the period 2004-2006, 217 exceptions were authorized at an additional cost of $451,930 (see A/63/524, tables 1-4). Thus, the number of exceptions to the standards of accommodation for air travel increased by

[1] In resolution 53/214, sect. IV, para. 14, the General Assembly decided that the President of the Assembly should have full authority to use the funds provided by the budget for the Office of the President, including travel.

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12 per cent from one period to the next, while the additional cost increased by 16 per cent. The Advisory Committee notes from additional information provided to it that a large part of the increase in exceptions for the period 2006-2008 is attributable to the travel of security officers accompanying the Secretary-General. The Committee was also provided with a graph showing the cost and number of exceptions from 1990 to 2008.

5. **In the Committee's view, the purely statistical presentation in the Secretary-General's report is of limited usefulness. It therefore recommends that future biennial reports on this issue contain an analysis of the reasons for the increases and/or decreases in the number of exceptions, taking into account such issues as industry trends and security requirements, as well as other related matters.**

6. In this connection, the Advisory Committee reiterates that exceptions should be carefully scrutinized and recalls its recommendation that the General Assembly request an audit by the Office of Internal Oversight Services of all categories of exceptions authorized within the framework of standards of accommodation for air travel (A/61/661, para. 4; see also General Assembly resolution 62/238, sect. XV). Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that the requested audit review was expected to be finalized by April 2009.

7. The Advisory Committee further recalls its recommendation that the Secretary-General be requested to submit a comprehensive report, on the basis of a review by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and specific proposals, with a view to harmonizing standards of travel for staff of the United Nations common system, indicating the measures that can be implemented under the authority of the Secretary-General, as well as those that will require the approval of the General Assembly (A/62/351, para. 5). **The Committee recommends that the comprehensive report also take into account the recommendations of the above-mentioned audit review by the Office of Internal Oversight Services.**

8. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that, in response to General Assembly resolution 62/238 (sect. XV, para. 5), CEB is reviewing the policies and practices of travel across the United Nations system with a view to proposing steps towards harmonization. The Committee was also informed that the CEB secretariat convened, in October 2008, the first meeting of the joint Human Resources/Finance and Budget Network working group on standards of accommodation for air travel. The working group is expected to present a progress report to the High-level Committee on Management at its meeting in September 2009. **In the Committee's view, an update on the status of the CEB review should have been included in the report of the Secretary-General on the standards of accommodation for air travel.**

9. **Bearing in mind that a comprehensive report by the Secretary-General is awaited (see para. 7 above), the Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly take note of the Secretary-General's report on the standards of accommodation for air travel (A/63/524).**